

From my personal and professional experience there are 5 important concepts which are key to a healing journey through mental health.

1. Perspectives Matters

It is natural to take other people's perspectives without evaluating them ourselves.

Three important questions about perspectives in mental health are:

- What is (depression / anxiety / trauma / addiction, etc.)?
- What causes it?
- How does it differ from the normal experience of others?

The answers to these questions decide for us what can help, or if we can be helped at all.

If one thinks that their anger problem which causes them to rage and lose control is due to their genetics, it creates a paradigm where you cannot be helped from the start, since no one can change their DNA or family origin. However, if one thinks that behavior is a choice and takes personal responsibility for their actions it creates a paradigm where change is possible because choices can be changed.

By opening up the possibility to change a person's thoughts and beliefs about what is going on, counselling can help clients understand their power to change.

2. Context is Everything

Without knowing the context, we ultimately know nothing. Everything from tears to yelling to worry has its place in our lives; we may cry for a long period of time after the passing of a loved one, we may yell when we feel unheard, or we may worry at night when we feel unsafe.

The key questions about this are:

- Does the feeling or behaviour make sense given its context?
- Where or when did I learn to do this?
- Who or what in the context makes the feeling or behaviour likely or unlikely?
- Just because it may be justified, is it helpful?

Good counsellors first work with clients to build an understanding of how everything makes sense. Before jumping to the conclusion that there is something "wrong" with a person or behavior, we must understand the context around it. Once we understand the context we can start looking at how to support what behaviours are helpful and change those that aren't.

3. You Are Not Alone

You are not the only person struggling. In today's world all too often we only see and hear other people's successes; this leaves us comparing our lives only to the successful parts of others. This flawed way to compare lives can lead us to think there is something wrong with us. I am not saying that there aren't people struggling with mental health due to a biological reason or that all lives are equally challenging, just that who and what we compare ourselves to is vitally important.

In most cases there are family, friends and communities who care deeply. It may be hard to spot those people in your life however, you must understand that your struggles with mental health are challenging for them as well. Remember that they are doing everything they can to support you.

In situations that you truly feel no one cares, know that I and many professionals do. We are in this to see you succeed. We want to see you become the greatest version of yourself and we are doing everything in our power to support that. Counsellors should help you understand you are not alone, and that they care deeply about what is going on in your life. If you think you are not getting this from your counsellor tell them and make a change if they aren't willing to.

4. Feeding the Beast

As soon as we label ourselves or others we create a "thing". This creation gets bigger every time we say that it does something to us or takes something from us. The bigger it is, the more it takes, and the less we think we can control our lives.

For example, if you say because of depression you were unable to go out then "Depression" controls your schedule. If this continually happens this idea gets more evidence to support itself and will tend to happen more frequently; soon you are subject to its demands.

Now if we change the language around, it can look completely different. Try saying because I'm feeling down tonight I'm going to stay in because I just don't feel I have the energy. This puts the subject, you back in control, rather than "depression", and makes the idea of depression less powerful. This brings us back to the first questions of what is depression / anxiety / trauma / addiction, etc. and who or what is in control.

Good counselling will work on ways to put you back in control to help you have the power to make permanent life changes.

5. The Possibility of Change

I have not met a person facing challenges with mental health who doesn't ask whether it can change. There are three truths about change.

Evidence

The evidence that we can change is conclusive. In my practise I see change everyday. Yes, it takes time, it may look different than expected, it can take longer than any of us desire, and, lives can get better. We often think of ourselves as exceptions but through counselling most people make changes towards a better happier future.

Expectations

When battling mental health, we can start to think that there is something wrong with us because life is hard. We can not expect counselling, or any other support, to be able to stop life from being challenging. What we can expect is that they make the situation better. If the situation isn't getting better with the supports you have in place, I encourage you to tell them and make a change if they aren't willing to.

Patience and Action

These two pieces are important to think about together. If we do not act in anyway different, it would be crazy to think anything in our lives will change. When we do something different, we need to allow time before we can evaluate if the situation is improved. Good counselling should be able to evaluate the balance between patience and action. Sometimes it is about doing more and sometimes it is about slowing down and letting life rebalance.

I offer all of this because I have a deep desire to see change. I have spent a good portion of my life doing everything I can to see this happen. I believe in counselling and I believe in you. If this has been helpful at all, please send me an e-mail to let me know.

Wade Hirschfield

wade@torchlightcounselling.ca

If you feel ready to begin a journey with Torchlight Counselling, [book now](#) at torchlightcounselling.ca.